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# THINKING THROUGH

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ALVA MARTIN KERR, D.D.



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*Facts and Principles to Clarify  
the Controversial Thinking in the Church*

BY

ALVA MARTIN KERR, D.D.

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THINKING THROUGH  
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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



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# THINKING THROUGH



## Chapter One

### THE CHURCH AND SCIENCE

Christian faith has of late been driven into an embittered and decimating controversy by the two extreme groups within the Church, one of which has no God that seems either accessible or usable and the other of which rigidly insists that Christian faith is inseparably identified with a theological viewpoint that is both unintelligible and useless to an increasing proportion of our younger population. These two groups have noisily held the stage of action all too long, and other and more moderate elements owe it to the Church and the world to make their own positions better known.

There is a conservative group who hold a viewpoint which is Christian and wholesome and at the same time far broader and more adaptable to modern knowledge than that which recently has been thrust into such prominence as the only genuine form of conservative Christian belief. There is also a large and growing

liberal element in the Church who are absolutely and thoroughly Christian, as devout in their loyalties to Jesus Christ and to the Bible as they are genuinely sincere and reverent in their conception and interpretation of Christian truth. These two groups are drawing ever closer to each other under the compulsion of truth as well as through the spirit of Christian fellowship. Moderate conservatives are beginning to recognize how insecure is the standing of conservatism with the younger and educated generation into whose hands, whether we will or no, is rapidly coming the keeping of faith. They perceive that any system of Biblical interpretation which cannot freely and adequately adjust itself to other vast fields of knowledge is bound to become untenable—at least to a rapidly increasing number of the coming generation. Fathers and mothers ought not blindly and stubbornly to make Christian faith seem intellectually impossible to their own children. Yet many of the sons and daughters of men and women of the old-time knowledge and theological viewpoint are in grave danger of being forced into unbelief by the inhibitions which their elders are placing upon acceptable faith.

Unless these honorable and sincere young people can be given some other alternative than the rigidly literal and exceedingly inadaptably interpretation of the Bible which extreme conservatism offers them, there can be no question but that they will be intellectually driven to disbelief. On the other hand the moderate liberals are beginning to realize how easily and thoroughly the heart may be riven out of Christianity by the extreme forms of liberalism. They have been shocked by the extent to which the extremists in their own group will go in fraternizing with agnostic and materialistic unbelievers and in denaturing Christianity and putting it on a par with other religions. They know how cold and impassionate such liberalism is and how impotent and helpless it stands before a warm-hearted and very human humanity that, in its larger and collective capacities as well as in its purely personal equations, is in desperate need of a Savior. Hence these moderate liberals are seeking an interpretation of the Christian gospel that will be warm and vital and at the same time couched in intellectual formularies which will be acceptable and dynamic to a modern-thinking world.



It is high time that this great intermediary group in the Church, composed of these thinking and tolerant conservatives and liberals alike, should come to a better understanding of each other and together give strong and open avowal of the marvelous varieties and latitudes of intellectual beliefs which have been and can still be accommodated within the norm of deep and abiding and ever-faithful Christian faith. Unless this is done and done quickly, faith will be wrecked for millions, and the Church itself bids fair to suffer immeasurable harm. The occasion and the dire need call for cool-headed, careful thought and guidance, and not for stubborn and angry belligerency. The object of this little volume is simply to suggest certain facts and principles which must come to guide the Church in thinking some of these questions through to a safer basis.

*First:*

So much loose talk has of recent years been set afloat against science and scientific learning that every fair and honest-minded Christian should remind himself that the various sciences have now been interwoven not only into all of

our knowledge but into all of our life in such a way that they are vitally fundamental to modern living as well as to modern thought. The natural sciences are basic to medicine and surgery, to inventions and agriculture, to chemical and mechanical development, and to advancement of every kind. To an almost unthinkable extent modern scientific knowledge has entered into the everyday necessities and comforts of life. Whoever speaks disrespectfully or scornfully of science only betrays his own ignorance of the things which make modern medical and sanitary practices possible and modern mechanics and inventions serviceable. Without scientific knowledge civilized life would be turned back to the dark ages and the whole industrial and commercial and social fabric of modern life would be riddled and our present standards and modes of living made impossible. Mankind would again become semi-civilized. It is the height of absurdity, then, to ridicule science or scientific learning, or to hope to stay its hand or to curb its quest for knowledge and understanding. In a thousand fields, men and women, goaded by an irrepressible desire for knowledge and advancement, will

push further and further into the present veil of mysteries—and no subject will be found too sacred for their exploration and inquiry. And if it is futile to forbid such scientific investigations, it is folly to try to conceal their findings from the youth of the Church or to forbid the study of their conclusions. Innumerable avenues of publicity and teaching stand ready to herald every scientific theory abroad. Whether we will or no, science will continue on her way, unsilenced and unrestrained. Hence the Church never made a more serious tacital blunder than when it undertakes to shut from its pulpits and its schools those subjects touching religious beliefs and standards about which its own membership will freely hear and learn from many outside sources. The Church must find a wiser approach and an infinitely better method of handling such themes than through denunciation and suppression. It must learn to use science, not to abuse it.

### *Second:*

The character and motives of “scientists” have been so loosely and carelessly defamed that every Christian who wants to think either

fairly or honestly must recognize the fact that the great body of scientists the world over are genuinely sincere, and the vast majority of them are men and women of clean and wholesome lives. Hosts of them are beautifully and devoutly Christian. It is nothing less than absurd to suppose that men and women who have dedicated their lives absolutely to the pursuit of knowledge, many of whom are doing it at great financial sacrifice and often even at the risk of life itself for the good of humanity, would purposely and premeditatedly pervert and distort the truth which they are trying so hard to discover. Think for a moment of whom our scientists are. Our doctors and surgeons are scientists, as are our nurses—medical scientists. Our druggists and chemists are scientists—skilled in the science of chemistry; and you will find some of them in every great manufacturing institution and great agricultural experiment station in the world to-day. Our botanists and biologists are scientists, indispensable to agriculture, horticulture, and forestry. Our psychologists and physiologists are scientists, invaluable in the study of religion and of man as they are also

to the art of preaching and teaching. Our teachers are scientists, anxious to know the truth and to be skilled in its propagation—as all preachers surely ought to be also. And so we might go on through the list—a very long one. It is worse than silly, it is slander, even to infer that all this great body of earnest, consecrated, Christian men and women engaged in these various lines of learning are insincere and purposely perverting the truth. Whatever else these scientists are doing, they are not “kidding” themselves. They are exceedingly and desperately in earnest in all of their research work, and many of them pursue their investigations with something like religious fervency and devotion. To them, the search for truth has become a veritable passion. No opinion is so hallowed, no belief is so sacred, as to stand in the way of their honest inquiry into what is really true. They have not always thought wisely nor well. They have many times been inconclusive in their research and premature in their conclusions. But they have at least been earnestly seeking to know the truth.

*Third:*

Religious teachers and preachers should hold in mind far clearer than some of them obviously have done the indisputable fact that no man can *will* a change in his convictions or belief on any subject. Every rational being arrives at his opinions by the process of reasoning from what he knows. His mind comes to certain conclusions from the knowledge or lack of knowledge which he already has, or from his skill in reasoning logically and inclusively from the knowledge which he possesses. Thus it will be highly improbable that the scientifically educated youth will be able to think like his mentally untrained father. They should be able to agree upon many of the profound and controlling verities which underly religion and life, but it will be very unlikely indeed that the son will be able to accept all of the subordinate ideas or to accommodate himself to all of the phraseology and opinions in which the father has been accustomed to express his religious convictions. But this does not necessarily mean that the young man is losing his Christian faith and aspiration. Rather does it indicate that he has a far

greater and more intricate knowledge to which he must adjust his religious faith and opinions. The old surface beliefs that were quite consonant with the simple knowledge of his father break down utterly in the accommodations which they must make with the vast number of contacts that are raised by his broader knowledge in many fields of learning. Parents must remember also that our schools are giving their children a much finer skill in coördinating thought than they themselves may have acquired. To the illogical, there is nothing incongruous in holding in one realm of knowledge opinions directly at variance with those one himself holds in another realm of thought. But to one trained to think scientifically, such lack of correlation is itself heresy. The world to him is one vast unit, and it is not permissible to entertain in one realm of it an idea or belief that seems in utter contradiction to what is known to be true in another realm. Hence it has been a great mistake for churchmen to try to coerce the scientifically trained to accept unscientific beliefs. Rather should our effort have been to prove how truly scientific and basic is religious faith and how imperfect



and uncoördinated is the thinking which tries to account for God's world on purely naturalistic and materialistic hypotheses and leaves out of count the whole great body of spiritual truth, the reality of which has been so long and so well attested. Our method is not to try to force any man to think other than he does. He cannot even force himself to do so. But the thing to do, and the most that we can do, or that he can do, is to supply his mind with other knowledge and with other viewpoints and thus furnish it with another basis of reasoning. If we are dissatisfied with the opinions of others, we cannot change their views by legislation or denunciation. We must *convince* them by arguments and by an array of facts and reasoning which will compel their mental assent, even in spite of themselves. In consequence of all this, we effect nothing but to make ourselves ridiculous when we seem to assume that sincere men could think differently than they do or more clearly than they do if they would simply will themselves to do so. It is ours to enlighten and convince them, not to berate them.

*Fourth:*

We should direct our activities and our legislation by the light of the incontrovertible fact that it is impossible to suppress thinking. We may suppress free speech. We may shut out of our schoolrooms and of our pulpits the teaching of any particular dogma or opinion. But that will not prevent men from thinking and from pursuing the truth and from trying to find out the facts about things, nor keep them from drawing the logical conclusions from the facts which they do have. Moreover, every attempt at suppressing thinking or at denying freedom in preaching and teaching has succeeded only in driving out the real thinkers from the church or the government which has undertaken it. Suppression does not stop thinkers from thinking; it simply deprives these constituted bodies from the uplift and indispensable benefit of thinkers. It did this for the Catholic Church, when that church prohibited the scientists of that day from teaching that the earth is round and that the universe is held in place by gravity and that the blood circulates through the body. These inhibitions on scientific thinking simply drove the scholars of the world out of the Cath-

olic Church and into the Protestant bodies. The terrible consequence has been patent in the poverty and backwardness of every great Catholic country the world over from that day to this. The same thing happened in England when it undertook to suppress thinking—the Pilgrims and Puritans simply left the country and came to America to begin a new and great nation founded upon the principle of freedom in thinking and preaching and teaching. It is inevitable that the consequences will be the same in any State of this Union which undertakes to suppress this freedom of thought and expression which is vital to human progress. Thinking men and women will not cease to think nor to teach and preach; they will simply migrate from denominations which will not allow them to do so to denominations that will, and from States that will not allow them to do so to States that will—leaving their former habitat to the ignorant and slothful and inert of mind who do not know how to think or care to think. This is an eternal and irresistible principle of the human mind, as has been attested by all history.

*Fifth:*

Now over against all of this should be made plain to the scientific world and to the religious world that what is needed is not less thinking but more thinking. If civilization is to be saved and if the Christian religion is to be preserved, it is imperative, not that honest and sincere thinking be forbidden certain avenues and certain conclusions and that limits be set upon it; but rather that thinking be tremendously expanded and deepened, and made more profound than it now is. The old maxim declares, "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing." That is the controlling truth of the present situation. It is limited knowledge that is cursing and imperiling the world. It is because men know too little along one line compared to what they know along another line—misbalanced knowledge and opinion—that so much harm is being done. Too many preachers and teachers of religion know too little about science and far too many scientists know too little about religion—there is where the trouble comes. What the world needs, and sorely needs, is that both classes be made to feel the limitations and the perils of their own woeful lack of knowledge.

Far too great is the number of religious leaders who have no workable knowledge or even understanding of the physical sciences and who misinterpret and misrepresent the scientific hypotheses and conclusions against which they so hotly contend. Many of these churchmen have not the information and the intellectual resources to enable them to think in circles outside of the narrow little sphere to which their interest and education have been limited, and they are lost on a boundless sea the moment they get beyond a few well-worn shibboleths and ancient landmarks that long since have ceased to be the boundaries of real thinking. Nor have they yet learned to coördinate what knowledge they do have, but constantly accept and act upon principles in one sphere of learning which are in utter conflict to many of the ideas and opinions which they hold in some other sphere of thought. A clear and humble recognition of their unpreparedness to speak upon the technique or even the subject of evolution, for instance, would save much future embarrassment for many preachers and religious teachers who are eternally right in their major insistence upon the Divine involvements in crea-

tion, but who share with the rest of us a vast ignorance as to the exact processes and methods which God used in his handiwork—an ignorance upon which the Bible itself has not seen fit to enlighten us. But those who assume to speak without full-rounded and well-balanced knowledge are by no means confined to the one side of the subject. Many scientists have become so immersed with the study of the physical universe that they have forgotten the human universe. They have studied man—his origin, his physical composition, his likeness to the animal kingdom. But many of them have never given much study to humanity—its social and political evolutions and how they have been brought about, its intellectual and spiritual capacities and escapements, and other vital qualifications and characteristics wherein mankind is absolutely and impassably different from the animal world. Scientists must remember that they have not yet given an intelligible explanation for all of this unbridgeable difference by any theory of mere physical and natural processes and mutations. Many of the scientists have been as utterly unscientific in their thinking as have any of the preachers, and have



done no better in coördinating the knowledge which we do have—in that they have not even tried to account for and properly accredit the psychical, the social, the religious, out of which highly potential elements so much of human life has undeniably been builded and in which they themselves are common, everyday participants. Through the physical sciences they have learned to know man as an animal, but they know little about him as a human being. They have given much earnest investigation and thought to mankind as a scientific phenomenon, but they know precious little about folks—know them, that is, in that intimate and compassionate love and understanding with which the preacher and the missionary must know folks if they are to have any proficiency whatever in reclaiming the fallen or in exalting and transfiguring the highest and most potential qualities of the human race. A few weeks spent in earnest and intelligent attempt at human salvage and at social uplift would give many of these scientists a far broader and truer knowledge of the human being and a far more correct evaluation of the religious and spiritual verities than all of their years of experimentation and



reasoning in the laboratory have done. They would learn how utterly incompetent, apart from the religious and spiritual equations, are all other processes to perform some of the functions and furnish some of the motivations which are most imperatively needed right now to direct the individual and to save civilization. It is surprising that many scientists who know much about man know so little about men. As a consequence they are simply ignoring, and leaving out of their scientific calculations, the great spiritual forces that are unquestionably exerting an incalculable power in God's universe. These must be made to see and feel how provincial and unscientific their thinking is because it is incomplete and fails to take account of some of the vastest resources and potencies of which mankind has any knowledge. Natural scientists everywhere ought to be humbled and sobered by the vast amount of immature, ill-balanced, and half-baked teaching which has been done in the name of science. Young professors who know little of science and less of life have gained newspaper notoriety by saying shocking and irreverent things against the great eternal verities and against the great social conventions

and heritages. Instead of paying such chaps the honor of ponderous attack, the Church should make them feel their immaturity and shallowness. Just because a professor knows something about bugs or has experimented with white rabbits is no reason why he should presume to speak upon the value of the Christian religion or jauntily to recommend free love and birth control. Yet a great deal of that sort of thing has been done. What is needed more than anything else is to puncture their egotism and make them feel how unscientific they are to venture an opinion in a great field of vital thought and life of which they know so little. The peril to the Church and Christian thought has never come from scientists who speak scientifically of matters in which they have expert knowledge, but only when they speak unscientifically and amateurishly of other lines of knowledge of which they are desperately and oftentimes ridiculously ignorant. This, after all, has been the source of most of the suspicion and opposition to science within the Church. It has been the rash and silly statements of young professors in the classrooms, it has been the aborted conclusions all too hastily assumed by

some scientists from imperfect and very fragmentary evidence, and it has been the sensation-mongering of a few who have used their position or their recognized standing in one field to exploit their opinions in another field in which they were by no means qualified to speak—this it is which has given rise to the present distrust of scientific teachings and its effect upon religious and ethical truth. The scientists themselves ought to frown down this quite common habit as being utterly unscientific and quite unprofessional. The Church should do the same with her preachers and orators who do so much amateurish and absurd talking in the fields of knowledge in which they know so little or nothing. But the Church and Christian leaders have also the right and duty to insist that scientific teachers shall think reliably and profoundly and shall embody in their scientific conclusions the whole body of scientific facts and findings, spiritual as well as physical and natural. Outstanding Christian scientists would go a long way towards curing the present unwholesome situation if they would insist far more than they have done upon the same thing.

## Chapter Two

### THE CHURCH AND EVOLUTION

America and the world have of late been witnessing a sight which none of us ever had expected to see—the trial, in a public court and under the law of the land, of a public school teacher on the charge of teaching religious heresy. It was a new and strange experience for America, one as surprising to her herself as it was bewildering to those European nations which for a century and a half have heard much of our much-boasted and widely heralded liberty. Neither to them nor to ourselves is it plain just how it happened that in this Twentieth Century, and in enlightened and free America, we should have been treated to the novel spectacle of sensational publicity and poppycock which attended this trial. The incident bids fair to be an isolated and lonely phenomena in the annals of our history; but the backwash from the foment of which this trial at Dayton, Tennessee, was only an incident, will remain long with us and will do tremendous

harm unless the thinking of the Church itself is greatly clarified and unified on this question of evolution and its relation to Christian faith. The one outstanding significance of that trial and of all this whole evolutionary muddle is the appalling confusion and misconception which surrounds the whole question in the minds of the general public. This profound and consequential subject has been veiled in ignorance and greatly aggravated by shallow and irresponsible ridicule and buffoonery on both sides of the controversy. Within the schoolroom and by our student body evolution has indeed been treated seriously; but in the Church and among a large part of the general public, evolution has been and still is the mark for all sort of jest and ridicule, and is the object of a misunderstanding and misconstruction that is as stubborn and persistent as it is dangerous. With surprising superficiality, the discussions almost invariably have been carried far afield from the only point or two about which Christians *as Christians* need to concern themselves—but about which as Christians they do need to concern themselves. Hence it is of crucial importance to Christian faith and to the future life

and power of the Church that the public mind be clarified and deepened on this whole question of evolution—and the need is no greater among laymen than it is among many in the ministry. To help further such clarified thinking, certain principles should be held clearly in mind:

*First:*

It would greatly help to improve the brotherly spirit of the Church, and would deprive the present controversy of much of its sting and bitterness, if each side would emphasize a true Christian appreciation of the other. In the previous chapter we insisted that it is only fair and honorable to recognize the fact that the great body of scientists are exceedingly sincere, that they are earnestly and conscientiously devoting their lives to a pursuit of truth and knowledge, and that they are not trying to “put something across” upon the Christian world. This fact makes little less than slanderous the indiscriminate attacks which certain religious leaders have made so loosely against scientists and scientific teaching. On the other hand there is large need that scientists and the more liberal thinkers in the Church cultivate a deeper



appreciation of the great body of conservatives who look with skepticism if not with bitter opposition upon evolution and scientific learning. However misdirected may be their effort and however limited may be the norm of their thinking, these conservatives are truly and intensely concerned about Christian faith, and this of itself is a praiseworthy virtue which deserves high evaluation and generous appreciation. Liberal thinkers would be less impatient with these brethren if they would clearly recognize the value of such insistent and passionate Christian belief. If they cannot appreciate and admire their conservative brethren on the ground of intellectual worth and leadership, they can at least evaluate and appreciate them for their enviable consciousness of God and their anxiety to safeguard and protect for all humanity that which has been a highly cherished and invaluable inheritance of all the ages as it has been a very rich personal experience to them. Such passionate faith as theirs is a rich contribution of which the Church is sorely in need right now. The tragedy of it is that so much of this faith is obfuscated by retarded or misdirected thinking. Such intensity of belief in the reality and



preëminent worth of religion is needed to balance and hold in check the easy indifference with which a great many scientific teachers and liberal religionists discard spiritual contents and values. It is a misfortune that the controversy about evolution should have resolved itself in the minds of so many, both in the Church and out of it, as being a contest between men of regnant Christian faith on the one side and men of indifferent faith or even agnosticism on the other—and the fault has not all been on the side of ignorant conservatives. Far too many of the liberal thinkers, in the ministry as well as out of it, have manifested little of that fervent and passionate personal faith which alone has been the compelling and transforming power of the Christian religion in every age and generation. It would help mightily in this present situation if these liberals would come to a truer and more articulate appreciation of the beautiful and profound depths of personal and transforming faith which the great body of conservatives hold in the worth of the Bible and in the real and accessible personality and power of God through Christ Jesus. These are essential values of indispensable and crying need for hu-

manity just now which are too largely lost sight of and far too little emphasized in much of the teaching and preaching of liberals, especially as touching evolution and scientific subjects.

*Second:*

The scientists themselves ought to realize how very meager is much of the evidence on which they base many of their conclusions concerning evolution and how much credulity it takes on the part of the average man to accept such revolutionizing theories built upon such scanty foundation. In their enthusiasm for their theory and with the mental attitude which has been slowly built up by years of study and research along these lines, it is easy indeed for the scientists themselves to put great confidence and found great and revolutionary hypotheses upon a small body of evidence; but they do not seem to comprehend how credulous they are asking the lay mind to be to consent to such vast conclusions from such small facts. They many times attach an importance to isolated fossils far in excess of that which seems to the rest of us to be warranted. A striking example of

this is furnished by an article in the *Forum* for June, 1925. Written by Professor Henry Fairfield Osborn and entitled "The Earth Speaks to Bryan," one turns to it with avidity, but is disappointed to find that the preponderant argument furnished for evolution in this article is built upon a single tiny tooth "no larger than a pin-head," found in Nebraska in 1922, but which, though it is the only one of its kind discovered in America, is declared to surpass the "hoary antiquity of Jurassic time" and, according to Professor Osborn, "truthfully tells an unvarnished tale of the life conditions of an epoch in which the 'ancient little robber' flourished." That is some history to read from one tiny tooth! Now to the scientists that little tooth may perchance speak volumes. But these men ought to realize that it is asking a good deal of the rest of us to take it as irrefutable indication of the age of the earth or the processes of creation. It requires far more childlike credulity to build such a vast structure upon such a minute foundation than it does to believe the simple story of creation as it has been traditionally accepted. And it would help the scientists to be a little more patient and tolerant with

the anti-evolutionists if these scholars would realize how meager is the evidence and how insecure and incomplete are many of the findings of science and how much imagination and child-like faith it takes on the part of the ordinary individual unhesitatingly to accept revolutionary and sweeping theories that are founded thereon. On the other hand, the conservative Christian viewpoint has suffered serious handicap and humiliation in the minds of a great host of thinking and influential people by its refusal to recognize the value of any scientific findings and conclusions. Especially is this true with the multitudes of young men and young women who are pouring from our colleges and universities, and of whose viewpoint the conservatives have often shown such utter lack of perception and recognition. Confessions of ignorance and of amazing limitations in knowledge in archaeological, geological, and other lines of scientific research are almost boastfully made by conservative leaders as if such ignorance were a sign of grace. But for a man in this day coolly to admit that he is largely unacquainted with vast fields of knowledge in which our college and university students are trained, and that

he is not even interested in great expanses of human learning which throw much and helpful illumination upon the Word of God, inevitably means that his influence and leadership will rapidly wane among all groups of men and women who read much and think deeply. The preacher or Bible teacher who aspires to become an efficient defender of the faith in this generation, and especially who hopes to be efficient in helping the youth of to-day to adjust their knowledge and Christian belief to each other, does not himself dare to be ignorant of that knowledge nor blindly dogmatic and narrow in his statements of belief. It is a great loss for the Church and the Kingdom that passionate Christian faith is so often presented by the conservatives themselves as though it were inextricably bound up with ignorance and with the narrowest possible type of literalism. There is, we must reiterate, a conservative viewpoint that is undeniably Christian and wholesome and which at the same time is far broader and more adaptable to modern knowledge than the one which has been most prominent in the discussion of evolution and its bearing on the Bible and Christian faith.

*Third:*

Many of the scientists have been as dogmatic as have any of the theologians. They have assumed an attitude of positiveness and finality upon certain phases of evolution which is by no means justified by the facts in the case. They have accepted as final findings which are far from complete or conclusive and have jumped at conclusions which were not well founded and which later on have had to be greatly modified. There has been an atmosphere of cocksureness surrounding the theory of evolution which has been as unscientific as it has been irritating. Many scientists have a "closed mind" on the subject which is no more scientific and creditable as touching many very vital points of the discussion than is the closed mind of the anti-evolutionists. It would be exceedingly salutary if all would remember that there are a great many things about evolution which none of us know. Those scientists who are in the habit of drawing vast conclusions from exceedingly small and very uncertain evidence need to be sobered by the fact that it is barely possible that they may be mistaken! No less do the anti-evolutionists need to be disci-



plined by the same sense of finite limitation. Again and again the theologians of the past have been wrong in their deductions from the Bible touching scientific facts, and the Church has been humiliated and harmed thereby. Men of an earlier day were just as sure that the Bible pronounced against the rotundity of the earth and the solar order of the universe as are some men to-day that the Bible makes impossible the thought of evolution. It is just as dangerous to deduce too much about God's plan and method of creation from the Bible as it is from ancient fossils—and vice versa. An urgent need of the present hour is that both sides hold in abeyance much of their dogmatism about what God really did do, and stand together in humility before the abysmal lack of knowledge which still surrounds the whole subject, scientifically and theologically.

## *Fourth:*

The question with really informed minds is not the simple theory of evolution, but whether or not this theory shall be permitted to rule God out of his universe. Indeed there are very few informed persons to-day who do not



believe in evolution in some form or other and to some extent or other. Churchmen are not greatly concerned over evolution within certain bounds and restrictions. But what they are deeply concerned about, and have a right to be concerned about, is whether or not the theory of evolution shall be permitted to push God back and back until he is deprived of any significant place or meaning in the processes of creation. They are concerned, and have a right to be concerned, about whether or not God shall be robbed of *personality* and become simply some intangible, impersonal, unusable, mysterious force that means little or nothing to anybody. If many churchmen to-day seem to be needlessly distressed and overanxious about evolution, the scientists themselves are largely to blame for it. If the averagely informed man has gotten the impression that evolution rules God out, it is because many scientists have been altogether too free and easy in dispossessing God of any really obvious and meaningful place in creation. Scientists as a group have been all too chary about using the name "God" and too free with such terms as "First Great Cause," "Cosmic Force," etc. Indeed some

scientists have been as quick as Mr. Bryan himself to assume that the theory of evolution dispenses with God and makes needless if not incredible the thought of God. They have dwelt with such great emphasis and insistence upon the possibilities of the natural processes, with such slight if not slighting remarks about the spiritual processes and the hand of the Infinite in it all, that the impression has gone abroad from their teachings that evolution is purely a naturalistic theory of creation and leaves no part and no place for the directive intelligence and the brooding love of the Heavenly Father. One may pursue many textbooks and panegyrics upon evolution without ever getting the impression that creation is the handiwork of God and that man is the child of God, inherently different from the beast and separated from it with an impassable gulf that fixes his kinship in heaven even more eternally than any carnal nature can fix it on earth. This is the central and really only controversy against evolution. The Church has not only the right, but a deep and primary duty, to be interested in this phase of the question. And the origin of such anxious concern is not nearly so much due to the

scientific limitations of certain religious leaders as it is to the poor pedagogy and the imperfect if not immature presentation of evolution by the scientists. If those great Christian scientists had always and all of the time made plain and emphatic the fact that evolution only attempts to trace out the processes of God, that evolution leaves God in his place as the creator and ruler of the universe, and that evolution leaves unquestioned the explicit and differentiating kinship of man to the Heavenly Father—there never would have been all of this bitter and hard-fought controversy over the theory.

### *Fifth:*

On the other hand the anti-evolutionists have confused and grievously misrepresented the question by taking the position that evolution necessarily and inevitably will wreck Christian faith, and that one cannot be an evolutionist and at the same time safely a Christian. Now to think either intelligently or fairly one must recognize the fact that evolution does not predicate in all minds such a denial of God and such an annulment of the Bible as the Word of God as

evolution seems to do in the minds of these anti-evolutionists. If one is informed about the great Christian leaders and thinkers in the Church to-day, if one is informed about the great group of younger Christians who are coming out of our colleges and universities and soon will become the controlling element in the coming generation, he will simply have to admit, if he is fair and honest, that there are literally millions to-day who do accept evolution as a working theory but who at the same time are beautifully and unswervingly Christian. Many of them are wearing out their lives in ardent Christian service. Evolution to them neither destroys their faith in the Bible nor in the reality and accessibility of God, nor their profound belief in and fellowship with Jesus Christ. For anti-evolutionists to deny that these Christian evolutionists have a faith as regnant and secure as is their own, would be unpardonable and ignorant assumption. For anti-evolutionists to assume that Christian evolutionists, simply because they are evolutionists, do not have a Christian experience as profound and a Christian loyalty as unmovable as is their own, would be simply arrogant and unforgiv-

able egotism. There are far too many Christian evolutionists to make such an assumption and such an indictment of their faith tolerable to any one who wishes to think this question of evolution through fairly and honestly. The one triumphant, incontrovertible fact of the whole situation is that belief in evolution does not necessarily carry with it a denial of God or a discard of the Bible, as can be abundantly and unmistakably attested by the beautiful Christian faith and the enviable Christian life and service of a great host of men and women who do accept and believe evolution. This plain and indisputable fact robs the evolutionary controversy of most of its point. It means that the destiny and power of the Christian faith do not hang on this or any other scientific theory. When one declares, as a great anti-evolutionist recently did, "If evolution wins, Christianity goes; for the two cannot stand together," he is simply talking oratory. He is not giving a thoughtful, penetrating, reliable statement of an eternal alternative. The Christian faith cannot be jockeyed, even by its friends, into such desperate straits where its very destiny can be made to depend upon as uncertain a con-

tingency as what may be or may not be the final conclusions of science upon any question. Science will pursue her way unhindered and unrestricted, whatever our courts may say. But Christian faith can never be put at its mercy. The eternal councils of God stand sure. And those councils shall only the more surely emerge and prevail as man learns more and more about how to trace out the mind and processes of God in his book of nature as we need to learn more unerringly to trace them out in his Book of Books.

## Chapter Three

### THE CHURCH THE INTERPRETER

One does not need to mingle with folks very long, even with fairly well educated ministers and church people, to realize how chaotic and unstable is the thinking of to-day with reference to the theory of evolution and its bearing upon religious faith. It is a serious mistake to make light of this matter, as many scientists and not a few liberal preachers are doing. It is indeed a grave situation when such a great body of people both inside and outside of the Church have lost their bearings and are thinking neither deep nor straight upon the great questions which have been forced to the front by modern science. Religious faith is indeed imperiled when it is involved in so much ignorant and shallow thinking, and when so many church leaders on the one hand are trying to circumscribe it to ancient landmarks and not a few scientists on the other hand are trying to evaporate its fundamental foundations into a few



vague and impersonal and wholly useless hypotheses. The present aimless and uncertain wanderings of the popular mind, and especially the unmistakable fact that literally millions have no positive driving religious convictions, furnish a condition that may well give serious concern to any thoughtful person. It is only the very shallow mind which does not recognize the peril involved to religious faith in such a situation, and it ill becomes any minister of the gospel to meet it lightly. If Christian faith is to emerge from this present controversy purified and regnant, to be of infinitely superior worth to coming generations, the Church has before it the immediate and the difficult responsibility of purging and clarifying that faith and interweaving it into every scientific discovery and conclusion as the one indispensable interpreter of all truth. To assist the Church to get its bearings and find its present task, certain guiding principles should be held clearly in view:

*First:*

The world is just now in one of those epochal periods of transition in which humanity is struggling to throw off an old chrysalis and find

its bearings in the new and larger knowledge. Such a transition always is a perilous thing. It may as easily evolve into confusion and death as it may into larger liberty and life. Change does not necessarily and of itself mean improvement. Added knowledge is not a guarantee of either added goodness or added safety—for it may mean simply added hazard. The most threatening dangers to mankind to-day arise because we have not yet mastered and consecrated to unselfish and godly purposes the knowledge which already we do have. Too much of it is still used for selfish aggrandizement and war and oppression, instead of for human betterment. It is idle to suppose that mankind will naturally and inevitably grow better with every advance of intellectual knowledge. Civilization will be only the more imperiled unless our advancing knowledge can be clarified and put to goodly purposes by spiritual interpretation and motivation. Now this is the task and responsibility of the Church. And our anxiety should be not that the Church is disturbed over the tremendous undertaking which the present situation forces upon it, but rather that so many in the Church are seem-

ingly unaware of how profoundly faith and life may be affected by such a transition as that through which the world is now passing.

*Second:*

It is not safe to assume, as many liberals in the Church and some of the scientific teachers in our schools seem to be doing, that things will righten themselves and that Christian faith will just automatically come out all right in the end. There is nothing in history to warrant such an assumption, and it is only a most unscientific mental attitude towards history which could justify such complacent assurance. The only safeguard and perpetuation which Christianity ever has had have come through the intelligent defense and interpretation of faith and duty by the Church, or by those within the Church. There is no guarantee, and certainly no historic basis to assume, that it will ever be otherwise. Liberal thinkers have of late made much of the fact that certain Church authorities persecuted Copernicus and Newton and forbade men to teach the rotundity of the earth and the theory of gravity. They rightly ridicule such ignorant opposition on the part of certain leaders of the

Church at that time. But what they have not made plain is the fact that others within the Church were able to adapt their thinking to those new discoveries of science and to use them for the illumination and expansion of Christian truth and Christian faith. That is the reason, and the only reason, why Christian faith emerged in that day with a larger content and a firmer foundation than it had had before. It did not just happen that Christian faith lived and that Christian thought appropriated and used that new scientific knowledge for its own strength and good. It was only because the Church, through some of its clear-seeing Christian prophets and preachers, defended Christian faith and interpreted the new knowledge with spiritual insight and illumination and with the firm and unshakable conviction that the new knowledge enhanced and glorified faith instead of imperiled it—it was this, and this only, which saved the day for faith and brought about such happy results for that part of the Church which used and interpreted the new knowledge instead of undertaking to deny it or suppress it. It is of critical and tremendous importance that religious thinkers should not

lose sight of this fact in our present situation. The world will not drift into anything better. Christian thought and faith will not righten themselves. That is the task for the Church and has to be done by Christian thinkers who have a profound faith in God and in the value of Jesus Christ and who can think through every fact and theory in hand and forge into them an invincible Christian content and Christian interpretation. The Church and the world are in desperate need of such thinkers and of such leadership right now. And many of those Christian teachers and preachers who are taking the present situation so lightly, and with shallow optimism are complacently assuming that things will come out all right, the while they ridicule those churchmen who are deeply grieved and concerned over the question of faith and evolution, would be proving themselves far more surely prophets of God and would be rendering an infinitely more valuable contribution to the present critical transition if they themselves were passionately putting their mind and soul into an effort to help furnish wise and carefully balanced Christian leadership for the thought of the world—a leadership in which the

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Church and the world are suffering much dearth and need.

### *Third:*

The only thing about this whole question in which the Church is vitally interested after all is not to refute evolution, but to defend and preserve the foundational verities of the Christian faith. It matters little to any man how the world was created or when the world was created, or how or when man was created. The only vital question is *who* did the creating. The Bible does not tell how it was done, nor when. There is not a thing in the Bible to indicate how many thousand or millions of years ago that creation took place, nor the exact method by which it was accomplished. But the Bible does insist that God did it. And that vital insistence must come to be the clear, triumphant message of the Church. Let the Church clarify and maintain the fact that creation is all God's handiwork, and that sometime, somewhere, somehow *God* did breathe into man the breath of his own life and *man became a living soul*, transcendently different from all other animals—let the Church maintain this irrefutable fact



and conviction, and it may well leave it to science to figure out all that it can from the book of nature as to *how* this was all done. Anti-evolutionists must remember that the Bible does not go into the details and technique of creation. That of itself is ample proof that the *method* is absolutely inconsequential. The only thing that the Bible does make plain is who did it all. What is the use for the Church, then, to worry about that of which the Bible does not speak and of which most preachers and laymen know so little or nothing? No matter what science may, now or ever, decide as to the processes of his creation, the one incontrovertible and master fact remains that man is here, that he is crowned with capacities and possibilities which separate him from the brute with an impassable gulf, that he is by nature and instinct akin to God and capable of becoming a son of God in the most royal sense of that term. It is the one peculiar business and duty of the Church to burn that fact, with all of its significance and searching responsibilities, into the conscience of every human being. It is a sinful waste of time for the Church to debate with man his origin. Its sacred duty and function



are to uncover to him his present state and to convict him of his present sin and to point out to him his immediate duty. It is the mission of the Church to press home to evolutionists and anti-evolutionists alike the truth that, whether man was evolved from the brute upwards or "fell" from an angelic state downward, the self-evident fact remains that every man can and will easily degenerate to the level of the brute unless his life is continually purged and motivated by those spiritual powers and properties which evidence his kinship to the angels of God. The scientist may spend his time delving into the misty and uncertain past; and so may the theologian, if he is willing to be only a theologian and a controversialist. But the real prophet of God must ever keep his face turned to the present and to the future, and his message must ever be a stirring challenge of immediate and exacting duty and destiny. Science may well tell mankind of its long and painful struggle upwards; but it is the duty of the Church continually to convince and remind us that, apart from man's individual and collective struggle now and all of the time against temptation and selfishness and sin, there is utterly no

hope that humanity shall be able to escape destruction or reach forward to still further good. Science may tell us if she can of how mightily the natural processes of God have worked for man's development; it is the business and the unparalleled privilege of the Church to tell us with unerring certainty and unalterable conviction of the spiritual processes of God that maketh for righteousness, without which all of the natural and physical processes of creation would leave man only an unreasoning, unimaginative, sodden brute.

*Fourth:*

What is imperatively needed, then, is not a denial of evolution but a clear-cut Christian interpretation and appropriation of evolution. It is futile for the Church to attempt to prevent or direct scientific research. All of the legislatures and courts in the land could not stop men from discovering every possible evidence which throws any light at all upon the subject, nor could all of the legislatures and courts in the land force men to draw certain conclusions from that evidence. Whether we will or no, and in spite of anything that the Church can do or the

state can do, men will go on learning and thinking and expanding their ideas about God's universe—just as they have been doing for thousands of years. That is the business of scientists. It is theirs to bring us all of the light and knowledge which they possibly can. It is the business of the Church to interpret that knowledge, to impregnate it with a Christian conviction, and to sanctify it to highest and holiest purposes in man's thought and man's activity. It is the business of the Church to use all increased knowledge to expand and deepen and clarify the Christian faith and make it more regnant and more invincible than ever before. In every instance in the past in which the Church has undertaken to deny and prohibit scientific knowledge, it has been defeated and humiliated. But in every instance in which the Church has been wise enough to accept scientific knowledge and interpret it and apply it, shooting it through and through with the God-idea and the God-consciousness, Christian faith has been strengthened and invigorated, and God has been revealed to be a more wonderful God than mankind had known him to be. It was thus when modern astronomy lifted the

firmament from the hundred-mile limit which it held in the thought of man in Bible times to the unthinkable millions of miles of space which we now know it to be. Instead of God being in the thought of man the creator of a little earth with a few satellites, he became the creator of an unthinkably vast expanse populated by innumerable solar systems like our own. It was thus when modern geology and archæology pushed back the history of the world and of mankind from the six thousand years of Ussher's chronology to literally millions of years. God became an infinitely more painstaking and patient Heavenly Father, to have brooded over his children all of these countless ages. The writer never will forget how marvelously his thought of God, and of the beauty and the power of God, was magnified and infinitely exalted when, as a boy, he read Denton's geological lectures on how the earth was made. God then became to him a new and mightier and far more wonderful God. The Church can and should use evolution in the same way. Thousands of Christian evolutionists are already interpreting it in a manner that magnifies and glorifies the thought of God and the majesty

and power and triumphant processes of God. Whatever form of evolution may come to be the final theory and pronouncement of science, Christian faith stands to gain, not to lose, thereby—if *only the Church is wise enough and intelligent enough to give Christian interpretation and emphasis and conviction to that scientific finding and pronouncement*. If only the Church will remember that it is its one peculiar God-ordained function to be the interpreter of knowledge, to sanctify it and motivate it to the glory of God and the advancement and betterment of mankind, it will never need to be disturbed over any of the findings of science—but will only calmly and complacently use them to increase the power and the majesty of its gospel in the heart and mind of humanity. Any other course than this on the part of the Church is futile, and, as in the case of evolution, may well become perilously confusing and ridiculous.

## Chapter Four

### THE SUPREME TEST OF FAITH

Unquestionably the first question for every man to settle for himself in every religious controversy is whether or not he wants to be fair and honest and to think the thing through intelligently, or whether he intends to be a blind and prejudiced and partisan advocate of his own ideas, regardless of what is either true or fair. Religious history bristles with instances of men and women who were far more set on upholding their own preconceived views on trivial and inconsequential matters than they were upon safeguarding the big and essential elements of Christian faith and loyalty. Almost without exception these good people fancied that they were defending the Bible and Christian faith. It is a form of self-deception that is exceedingly subtle and against which every man needs continually to guard himself. Each individual alone has the power to decide his own attitude and approach to any question—

whether he shall have the unfair and closed mind of the bigot, or whether he shall have the honorable and wholesome spirit which seeks to see all sides fairly and desires only to hold fast to the truth. Every man must make this decision for himself; for it is an ethical matter, and tests the honesty and sincerity of his own soul. Others can help him only in clarifying confused and immature thinking and in unentangling Christian faith from the many perverting incidentals and opinions with which it has been mistaken and confounded. And here again certain great principles must guide him who would think honestly:

*First:*

It is as impossible for all men to think alike as it is for all men to feel alike. Nothing is plainer in the ministry of Jesus Christ than that he did not expect them to do either. One of the most striking things in the New Testament is the very evident variety of Christian experiences. Not all came to Jesus in the same way nor were tested by the same formula. Of the man born blind he required one thing, of the rich young ruler another, and so on through



his ministry. But the one invariable thing exacted of all was belief in him. Paul and John had strikingly different religious experiences, as did other of the disciples. But the one foundational basis of discipleship common to all was love and loyalty to the Master. Christ at no time and in no way intimated that all must have an identical content of either belief or feeling; and the Church has never erred more fundamentally than when it has undertaken to impose such an unanimity and agreement. Every man arrives at his beliefs through his knowledge and experience. Intellectual opinion is not nearly so much a matter of individual wisdom and discernment as it is of training and development. What a man thinks invariably depends upon what and how much he has read and studied and especially upon what have been the particular fields and how vast have been the circles in which he has done his reading and thinking. A difference of intellectual belief among Christians, then, a conflict of creeds, is absolutely no indication whatever that the one group has superior spiritual loyalty and penetrative insight to the other. It is far more apt to be an indication only that their schooling,

their mental training and content, have been and are different.

### *Second:*

Because our intellectual beliefs depend upon the whole body of our knowledge, all of which must dovetail and complement and interpret the other, that intellectual interpretation and dogma which will fit into one man's mental content and be to him inspiring and exalting would be absolutely inharmonious and impossible in the intellectual content of another. Faith, real Christian faith, lies far down beneath any such intellectual concept. Faith is embedded in the love and loyalties of a man's soul. Faith is a matter of kinship to God, of accepted and honored kinship, that binds one to God in intense and determined fidelity in one's every purpose and action. Faith is overmastering and compelling love for Jesus Christ and desire to do his will. And such faith does not depend for its reality or power upon any particular method of Biblical interpretation or creed. We find men and women of equally profound and controlling faith in the Bible and in Jesus Christ who are utterly at variance on doctrinal beliefs

or in their approach to and interpretation of the Scriptures. This is because real faith far underlies such views and only works itself out through them because they chance to be the views of the particular soul from which it springs. Hence every man must be permitted to work his own faith out through his own set of intellectual ideas. To try to force him to adopt and use those of another would be like throwing a monkey wrench into his mental machinery; for it would clash with and disarrange the whole body of knowledge which he has assembled. Thus to inject evolution, for instance, into the scientifically untrained mind may easily shatter faith, and seem to be an arrogant denial of God; just as in the spiritually untrained mind, evolution seems to predicate only the naturalistic and materialistic forces in creation. In both instances, the mind is lacking in the knowledge and experience which are necessary to complement and full-round the theistic evolutionary belief. But on the other hand, to try to force upon a scientifically trained mind an interpretation of the Bible or a concept of God's universe which are utterly at variance with all of the rest of his knowledge is a futile undertaking; for it

would simply be impossible for him to adjust his thinking to it. This is a primary and indisputable principle of thinking. It is impossible to force on to any man a philosophy or belief that is in fundamental and disruptive conflict with all of the rest of his knowledge and belief. And great violence has been done to Christian faith, and men have persecuted each other as heretics and rent the Church asunder time and again, simply because they were either too blind or too stubborn to recognize this most simple and elemental principle of the human mind and its thought-processes. The controversy which is plaguing and shaming the Church to-day and imperiling the standing and power of Christian faith in the minds and hearts of so many arises wholly from the violation of this simple principle. Men on both sides of the question are trying to force into the mental machinery of others concepts and interpretations which to these others, because of their mental processes and preparation, would be utterly irreconcilable and disruptive. What most is needed just now is the calm and sensible recognition of the fact that both viewpoints may be alike Christian and helpful to the particular individuals who hold them.

*Third:*

In the light of all this, it ought to be self-evident to every logical mind that the intellectual approach and interpretation of the Bible which are exalting and helpful to one may destroy its faith and usefulness in the mind of another, if forced upon him. Whoever is not logical enough to reason this out ought long since to have discovered it in his practical work with men. It is a most elemental principle in both the preaching and teaching of the Bible. Every preacher and Sunday-school teacher of any enlightened experience whatever has learned that the very sermon or dogma which is food to the soul for one person will afford no help whatever to another, and that the viewpoint which best unfolds and illuminates the Word of God for one dwarfs and imperils it for another. Hence any system of interpretation which is so rigid that it allows no room for different viewpoints is wrong in that it of very necessity would exclude from the faith all those to whom that particular viewpoint is an intellectual impossibility. No man or no group of men has any right to shut any other man from the Bible by insisting upon a system of interpretation that would not be helpful to him and

that he could not use. God has made the approach to his Word an infinitely broad one, and capable of adaptation to any degree of knowledge, however limited or however profound, that the mind of man can contain. And it is worse than futile, it is confusing and misrepresentative of both the Bible and real faith, for any one to try to narrow down the entrance to the Word of God to any one particular method of interpretation or line of approach, no matter which one it is. These systems have all been and are being mightily used of God; and every man must be permitted absolute freedom to choose the one that best fits his own knowledge and temperament and most makes the Bible the voice of God to his own soul. Any preacher or Bible teacher who has not learned this is competent to handle the Word of God helpfully only for that little group who possess his own type of mind and his own temperamental set of ideas; for among all others he is apt to be far more a source of irritation than he is of inspiration, and he is utterly unfitted by that limitation to be a leader and teacher for the whole Church of Jesus Christ. One of the greatest tragedies of the Church has been and



still is the fact that so many preachers and teachers have not recognized this primary principle of their high calling. If we are to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ *to all men*, as he bade us do, we will simply have to accommodate ourselves to their various mental make-ups and viewpoints, just as we do try to accommodate ourselves to their various other personal characteristics, and give to each of them an interpretation and construction of the gospel which will be intellectually possible and afford spiritual salvation for them. This must have been much of what the Apostle Paul meant when he said that he became "all things to all men" in order that he might reach and win them. He not only made himself congenial with all types and conditions of men and women, but he adjusted his message to their intellectual capacities and possibilities. He made his contact with them and his approach to their religious convictions through their mental concepts, not through his own. And he was well content if only he could persuade them to become thoroughly Christian, and made no effort whatever to Judaize them or convert them to the manner and belief of the Pharisees, of whom he had



been one of the chief. His deep-seeing and tolerant wisdom in this is to become our example and our method. We, too, must clearly recognize and preach the fact that the gospel of Jesus Christ is so transcendently infinite that no individual can comprehend and appropriate more than a mere segment of it; and that there are a thousand segments of wide variety, some one of which can be fitted as the very voice of God into every human soul. It is ours to discover each man and his segment and bring them together.

#### *Fourth:*

Because all this is true no man dare undertake to say what any other man must believe in order to be a Christian. The history of the Church proves that there is an exceedingly wide latitude and variety of beliefs which seem to be equally acceptable to Jesus Christ—at least men and women have experienced equal exaltation under them and each has seemed to enjoy an enviable share of the fellowship and benediction of Christ even though their intellectual beliefs were widely at variance and even in conflict. Upon this fact has been founded the primary

postulate of Protestantism—the right of individual interpretation and decision—and it would be tragical indeed to obscure or give up this primary tenet just now when the world and the Church are in such desperate straits for it. It is the one most foundational principle of Protestantism, the particular one which makes Protestantism most fundamentally different from Catholicism. It refutes the ancient claims of the priesthood to a more direct and fuller entrance into the mind and heart of God than that vouchsafed to the ordinary believer, and it denies the infallibility of the Church, or of any pope or group within the Church, and forbids their right to dictate what any man must believe in order to become a Christian. And this it does, primarily and necessarily does, because religious faith is inherently as individualistic as is life—and no man or church can parcel it out for the heart of another. The fullness of God's message is like the fullness of the sea, and the only restriction placed upon any one is his own individual capacity and disposition to receive. Hence no Christian dare lay down requirements and inhibitions for another Christian's beliefs, lest he silence the thing which

God is trying to say to that other man's soul. Even so, and under the same controlling principle of the sacredness of every man's own personality and the individuality of his own peculiar nature and need, no Christian dare to arrogate to himself the right or presumption to say what effect any particular dogma or system of interpretation will have upon the Bible for another. The very method of interpretation and approach which make it most the Word of God for one, let us insistently repeat, *may make it largely futile and useless for another*. And this is what is down underneath all of the present clash and controversy in the Church. Those whose mental and temperamental make-up and training, as well as theological bias and upbringing, permit the literal interpretation of the Bible to be acceptable to them, are making the fundamental error of trying to force upon the whole world their own particular system, testing men's faith and loyalty to the Bible thereby. Boldly and inflexibly they insist that the literal method of interpretation alone safeguards the Word of God. But this simply is not true for thousands in the Church to-day. There are multitudes of very devout followers of Jesus

Christ for whom the literal system of interpretation is an intellectual impossibility. If these honest and honorable Christians can be given no other alternative, they will inevitably be driven to unbelief. Shall this, then, be the test of their Christian faith, and shall they be given no option but literalism or infidelity? Is Christian faith built upon so narrow and insecure a foundation?

### *Fifth:*

Is there to be no other choice for such as these than *either* such extreme literalism *or* unbelief? They love Jesus Christ with an implicit and devout faith; many of them are passionately wearing out their lives for him in both the home and the foreign field. Is he such a Lord and Master that he will spurn such love and such sacrificial loyalty simply because these individuals find it intellectually impossible honestly to believe that a fish swallowed Jonah or that the sun was made to stand still? Shall the Church of Christ damn with the stigma of heresy such earnest and devout followers and servants of Jesus Christ as are many of these simply because of such "unbelief" as that? Is

God so insistent upon the trivial incidents and accidents of literalism and so indifferent to devout love and sacrificing service as that? A Heavenly Father who would place so little importance upon loving devotion and so much stress upon the letter of the law would be utterly repellent to any but a very blindly indoctrinated mind. There is not a thing in the entire teachings of Jesus Christ that even remotely indicates any such standard and measurement for Christian faith. He did not deal in the letter of the law but in its spirit; and he did not weigh men by their verbal exactness nor correctness but by the spirit which dominated them and motivated them. He was sternly impatient and provoked with the literalistic concept and requirements of the Scribes and Pharisees, and rebuked that thing more than any other one thing in all of his ministry. His supreme and only test of discipleship was belief in his own self and obedience to God's will; and whatever life was willing to abandon itself to his lordship was acceptable to him then, and there is nothing to indicate that such a life is not just as acceptable to him now. The question before the Church to-day, then, is whether it is going to

erect, or to permit men to erect in its name, some test of faith, some mark of Christian fidelity and genuineness, different than that which our own Lord and Christ exacts? Shall there be added to the simple requirements of the Master a number of tests and measurements which are extraneous to his teachings and a thousand miles removed from his lordship over the human soul? Are arguments either for or against evolution to be carried on in the name of religion and are they the finest contribution and testimony which the prophets of our own day can give for his gospel? Then his cause is indeed in a bad way. Christianity is a poor and emaciated thing if it has nothing more worth while over which Christian men and women may exercise their passionate fervency than the questions over which so many have recently been lavishing so much time and ardor. And the Church of Jesus Christ has a strange and perverted sense of values indeed if it will break itself into fragments over such scientific disputes as those by which at present it is being so plagued and persecuted. If such things as these are to be made the supreme test by which is to be decided whether or not men and women

are loyal to Jesus Christ and worthy the fellowship of his disciples, and if such things as these are to be made the supreme test by which the Bible shall be decided to be the Word of God and its preservation made sure, then will Christianity have lost its passionate challenge for vast multitudes of the more virile and forward-facing hosts in the Church to-day and the Bible will have been made to fall like a dead shell upon the soul of many of those to whom now it is the living Word of God. Such a catastrophe to Christian faith and to on-coming humanity must not be permitted, and we are confident will not be permitted, to happen. Cooler heads with clearer insight into the thought and evaluations of God are bound to exert their leadership; and men and women will be taught to know and to understand that the gospel of Jesus Christ is something infinitely bigger and mightier and more worth while than the questions and their incidental inferences with which the extreme evolutionists and anti-evolutionists have recently been tormenting us. And this larger and finer content of Christian faith will become the supreme test by which Christians shall recognize and honor each other.



## Chapter Five

### THE GREAT COMMON HERESY

That the Church has no business to be concerned with evolution unless it is really related to Christian faith and Christian life is a truth which will be readily conceded by controversialists upon both sides of the subject. If evolution does not come within the purview of essential Christian belief and has not some deep and decisive bearing upon moral and religious thought, it lies outside the anxiety of the Church. But there are those who claim that it does have a most fundamental relation to faith. They insist that the evolutionary theory not only displaces God and denies the Holy Scriptures, but assigns to man a degenerate origin which inevitably tends to destroy both his religious consciousness and his ethical aspirations. That there is a naturalistic, materialistic theory of evolution which tends to do this, no discerning Christian would deny. But that theistic evolu-

tion has had any ill effect upon Christian faith and morals cannot be substantiated by the facts. A careful analysis of present-day thought and life will show that whatever real heresy there is runs infinitely deeper than that.

*First:*

It has been freely and widely asserted by the extreme conservatives for several years that the present growing indifference to the Church and to religion and the increasing tendency to crime, especially among our youth, are directly chargeable to the doctrine of evolution and other lines of modern religious thought. Especially have they insisted that these deplorable conditions arise from what is known as the modern viewpoint of the Bible, and that the only way to preserve the vital and sacred influences of the Scriptures is by a rigid literal interpretation. But one needs only to do a little logical thinking to see that this analysis of the situation will not hold. For hundreds of years the conservative viewpoint and the literalistic method of interpretation have held sway, and still hold sway in the vast majority of churches and communities. In face of this fact, truth forces us

to admit that, as every one familiar with history well knows, sin and iniquity were cursing the world in the palmiest days of the ancient orthodoxy also—the very orthodoxy the loss of which it is now so freely asserted is the cause of our present unsatisfactory state of religion and morals. A look into the past is sufficient to prove the fallacy of such charges. No honest thinking dare ignore the widespread drinking, the public and unrestrained harlotry, the almost inconceivable brutalities in mines and factories, the human slavery and serfdom, that took place under the old theology. The days when utter orthodoxy was in its prime were by no means notable for their righteousness. Our believing forebears were not all saints by any means. Nor is the contrast any more reassuring for that extreme theological viewpoint to-day. Those communities and even whole States which are most thoroughly orthodox in their religious beliefs are in many instances among the most retarded on moral lines. In spite of the fact that the vast proportion of the ministers and churches of this nation have been and still are theologically conservative, the present alleged breakdown of faith and growth in crime

have come—and come under this type of preaching and teaching. It would be giving altogether too much credit of power and influence to the small margin of really liberal churches and preachers to admit that their theology was the cause of all of our present perilous tendencies. Clear thinking and analysis permit of no such absurdity. One need only turn to our prisons to find how large a per cent of the criminal class are still orthodox in their theology, and one need only to examine some of the most politically and industrially corrupt institutions of to-day to learn how thoroughly and even ardently conservative they are in their religious thinking. But on the other hand, a similar breakdown in moral and vital religious stamina can be found just as abundantly among those who hold to the modern theology.

### *Second:*

In discussing the present state of religious thought and morals and their relation to each other, one must recognize the fact that no generation can completely sever itself, either in thinking or life, from all of the generations which have gone before it. In fact it is an

error to conceive of human history in the terms of generations, as though each age were a clearly defined group, distinct and separated by itself. At every period of history, two or three different generations are overlapping. Youth, middle life, and old age live together and intermingle and each deeply influences the other. Hence to analyze any particular "generation," we must know what has preceded and what is being handed down to it from those who have gone before. No analysis, then, could be more superficial and perilous than to undertake to judge the present without reference to its inheritances from the past. Take the oft-cited case of Germany, for instance. Only the most shallow thinking or great ignorance of the history of that nation could impute to Nietzsche and the extreme theological liberalism of that country all blame for the war. One cannot too severely condemn the irreverent and rankly materialistic liberalism of Germany and the part which it played in modern German philosophy. But the straight thinker must take into his survey of the situation also the fact that the doctrine of the "divine right of kings," which had much to do with the Kaiser's attitude

and which upheld his authority, dates back to the time of Luther. It was that great religious reformer himself who in his fight against the Roman Catholic Church appealed to that theory and established it in the minds and hearts of the German people, it being just then perhaps his only recourse and defense against the pope. And it was Luther himself who first gave Christian endorsement to that type of German "ruthlessness" against the enemy which made Germany so hated and abominated in the last war. Thus it was the wrong conservative thinking of the past synthesized with the extremely materialistic and unchristian liberalism of the present which played havoc with Germany and led it into doing the things which it did. And to a marked degree, it is this same sort of co-mingling of conservative and liberal error which has generated our present unfortunate and threatening situation here in America. And neither side is in any safe position to blame the cause for these conditions wholly upon the other.

### *Third:*

Seeking a cause for the spiritual and moral retrogression from which the world is suffering,

it is only natural that those who have kept their minds centered narrowly to the theological outlook should assume that any falling away comes from a letting go of the old theology. But other factors infinitely more potent than theology as such have been working. Prominent among these have been the failure of the Church in so large part to perceive the implicates of its own gospel, especially in its relation to social and industrial conditions. In many nations there has been quite a turning of the working classes from the Church, and consequently from religion, because they have felt that the Church was indifferent to social injustices if not actually antagonistic to any improvement thereof. However correct or incorrect was this impression, it has been a tremendous factor in breaking down that *en rapport* which we all might heartily wish had been more successfully perpetuated between the labor world and organized Christianity. Another thing which has been instrumental in separating many from the Church is the suspicion that it has been a defender of the status quo and has used its influence against social and political reformations that had as their objective the betterment of humanity. Veritable multitudes have remained



unpersuaded that the Church itself believes in or desires any superior type of Christian idealism in those larger spheres of social, national, and international activities the dream of which has become so dear to the human heart. And now perhaps the most significant thing of all in our present discussion is the fact that so many churchmen, especially of the conservative school, fail to see the tremendous import of all this and cannot understand why the failure of the Church to put its gospel on an out-and-out basis of Christian idealism has had anything whatever to do with the alleged "falling away from the faith" which they so loudly deplore. They cannot seem to see that other instrumentalities far more forceful than theological belief—as they are using that term—have induced a religious indifference if not skepticism on a scale far too general to be passed over lightly. But conservatism must not be allowed to evade its own responsibility for this present situation by being permitted to shove all of the blame off on to the new theology. The world is as yet largely of its own making. The new theology is new and by no means dominant. And be it remembered that *this new theology*

*did not create the distrust of the Church and of the ancient theological shibboleths and viewpoint.* Modern intellectual training and progress in a thousand fields of knowledge did that. The new and more liberal theological viewpoint has been trying to save the day for the Bible and Christianity. It came into existence as a necessity—an honest endeavor on the part of sincere Christian thinkers to give a theological conception that would be acceptable and believable in the light of modern knowledge—to take the place of the old orthodoxy *which already had become intellectually impossible for millions and was necessarily being discarded by them.* Whoever cannot perceive that historic fact and its significance is not capable of thinking the present situation through. The new theology and the new approach to the Bible were created of imperative necessity to save Christian faith, not to destroy it. Many of the old theological tenets and shibboleths which once were powerful incentives to the conscience and had exerted a most important corrective and restraining influence in the days of limited education and superstition, had already been discountenanced—never again by any sort of

persuasion or possibility to be generally accepted or vitally effective. The new scientific knowledge had forever denatured and made ineffective many of the religious warnings and incentives which formerly had been potent for moral and spiritual correction. This was the situation which gave birth to modern theology. But it was a supreme opportunity which has been illy met. For it is self-evident that the new theology has not yet furnished a sufficient conscience and casuistry to hold modern life in check and carry it safe-balanced through its marvelously multiplied and intensified temptations and dangers. This, above all other periods of human history, is no day for an effete religion. It will take something of far sterner stuff than the soft, namby-pamby, rosewater solution of extreme liberalism to hold mankind wholesome—or to be true either scientifically or religiously. God exacts lawful obedience no less impartially in the moral and spiritual world than he does in the natural, and the transgressor or the slothful can no more hope to escape punishment in the one than he can in the other. That is the word of science no less than of religion. This fact needs mighty dynamic em-

phasis right now. The consciousness of sin and the need of a Savior, the sense of holy personal responsibility, and the fear of rigid accountability to God have disappeared to far too great an extent from modern thinking. These eternally true and highly surcharged incentives to right living must be reclaimed *and restated in the language of our own day*. The new scientific learning must be used to enforce, not to weaken, the primary truths and moralities of Christ's gospel. Hence those conservatives have made a grievous mistake who have opposed science. They should have interpreted it and used it for Christian ends better than the liberals have done. It is futile for these conservatives to try to whip the modern mind back into the ancient norm and the ancient ideas. But rather are they called of God to be prophets to our own day and generation in order that they may use our present-day knowledge and outlook to force into the new and nerveless liberalism a reinterpretation and restatement in modern terms of those more vital and passionate elements of Christian faith which are being so widely neglected to-day, and without which Christianity will have lost her will to correct

as well as her power to save. It is this synthesis of the new and the old which alone in every age and generation has made Christianity amply effective.

#### *Fourth:*

A thousand and one things have contributed to bring about the present ethical and religious situation, and one cannot account for it wholly upon theological grounds—save to the extent to which the Church of to-day has not adequately adjusted its thinking and directed its efforts and appeal to meet the new situation with which it has to cope. Modern science has injected into our present-day life some serious questions with which the theologian may have to deal; but the effect of this upon theology and philosophy has been as nothing compared to the profound problems which modern scientific learning has created for practical and applied Christianity. Not only has modern thought been changed; but the whole norm and content of modern life have been radically modified, and modified in a way that has vitally effected the attitude of people towards life as well as towards religion. New and mighty influences

have been brought to bear upon this new day, some of which are working the most serious consequences upon Christian thought and ethical idealism. The modern press, with its scavenger propensities and its largely paganish philosophy, has become the only medium of information and direction for vast numbers. The "movie" in no little part is now a very school-room for multitudes in the technique of crime and in the inspiration to all sorts of prodigal and luxurious life and salacious imaginings. The new methods of travel and communication bring the erstwhile conventional and innocent communities and groups into touch and familiarity with the morally depraved stratas of life and spread the example and virus of evil with a rapidity and thoroughness which were never known until in our own day. To these and a score of other modern influences which have powerful tendencies to evil must be added a widespread and easy-going materialism which is in deadly conflict with spiritual idealism and with the finer type of Christian moralities. And now, any careful survey and analysis of this condition reveals the illuminating fact that extreme conservatism is no more successful in



dealing with the situation than is extreme liberalism. The one confounds Christian faith with many incidentals and ties it up with things which it is simply impossible for many to believe; and the other dilutes and denaturizes Christian faith until it contains nothing which is really worth while for any one to believe. The result has been a very general deadlock of negation. An amazing number, even of church folk, know many things which they do not believe, most of which are of little consequence, but have no deep and unswerving moral and religious convictions on those great and central themes of Christian faith which alone make Christianity vitally effective.

### *Fifth:*

The common and deadening heresy of to-day does not arise from incidental and secondary considerations. It springs from no superficial unbelief. It comes rather from some primary and elemental defect in religious thinking. It is useless to search for its origin in the trivial and in the inconsequential. We must seek for it in those profound issues which touch and effect the very mainsprings of thought and life.



On every hand is substantial evidence that men and women are indifferent to religion and fail to live up to the highest Christian privileges and duties of life, not because they do not believe the ancient creeds and not because they do not accept the Bible literally, but from far more basic reasons. Their unbelief goes down into the controlling motives of their daily living and is imbedded in their deepest and most motivating philosophy of life. Their heresy lies in the fact that they do not really and truly believe in the things in which Jesus Christ believed and for which he gave his life. They do not believe that the highest and finest idealism of Jesus Christ is practicable for present-day life and that Christianity in its finest essence will work. This is the one great and paralyzing heresy of to-day. It is this hopeless infidelity which makes excuses and justification for a selfish and cruel industrialism, on the plea that it cannot be made genuinely Christian. It is this unimaginative unbelief which will not even attempt to evangelize and Christianize our corrupt political practices. It is this atheism that rules God out of his world, and advocates white supremacy and racial superiority and defends

an obviously pagan internationalism on the ground that statehood cannot be Christianized and races and nations taught to live together in peace. It builds great navies and supports great armies and teaches Christian men how best to kill each other because it does not have faith enough in Jesus Christ to believe that his spirit and precepts are a stronger defense than military preparation. In the face of such fundamental and deadening unbelief as this it is only stupendous and tragical misapprehension of both the Bible and of our own times which could permit great church leaders to waste their time over the incidental and theoretical questions that have come in for so much heated discussion.

### *Sixth:*

The most discouraging fact of it all is that such heresy is quite common inside as well as outside of the Church, and can be found in every type and shade of both conservatism and liberalism. There is a host within the Church to-day who deceive themselves into believing that they receive the Bible literally, and yet whose lives every day make vital denial of its

most primary requisite and essential Christian spirit. They contend to the uttermost for the verbal and historical accuracy of Genesis and then fall down completely on the Sermon on the Mount. They have implicit faith that the sun really did stand still for Joshua, but they have no confidence whatever that the teachings of Jesus Christ are practical and applicable to present-day living. They would not symbolize the story of the creation as found in Genesis for anything, but they both symbolize and nullify the injunctions of Jesus Christ to "take no thought for the morrow" and to "love your enemies" and "to go into all the world and preach the gospel." This spirit is just as true among liberals as it is among conservatives. Many liberals find it just as easy to allegorize the Cross with all of its marvelous significance as they do the story of the creation, and thus rob the Crucifixion of any vital consequence to the great masses of humanity who have deep and crying need of a sufficient Savior. Many of the liberals etherealize and "pantheize" God and push him back further and further into the immutable processes of creation until he means as little in the great ethical issues of life as he

does to the passionate desire of the human soul that yearns for a conscious touch with the Infinite. Neither theological crowd, let us repeat, is in any position to lay the blame upon the other. There does not appear upon the entire landscape of Christian activity to-day any well-defined and distinct group that stands out in bold relief as having been preëminently successful in clarifying and applying Christian faith and giving it triumphantly dynamic qualities for the present situation. Here and there men and women in different groups have been more or less successful, each largely with their own type of individuals. But there has as yet appeared no great class of present-day prophets with a unified interpretation and message so eminently fitted to the knowledge and needs of to-day as to make them manifestly the prophetic leaders and voice of God for our own times. It is a situation that rebukes the liberals as well as the conservatives, and the conservatives as well as the liberals. Somehow both schools of thought have as yet failed to meet the situation with such marked degree of success as challenges a large and invincible following. Some mighty emphasis, some peculiarly fitting and

timely interpretation and content, are yet lying latent in the gospel of Jesus Christ for our own day and generation, and the world awaits that prophet of God who can sufficiently synthesize the myriad voices of truth and harmonize the conflicting and jangling and incomplete interpretations—jangling because they are incomplete—and mold them into one mighty and compelling conviction to hurl against the sordid materialism and the religious indifference of to-day. Just what that message and emphasis must be, no one as yet seems clearly to have apprehended. But one thing is sure. It will be found in neither extreme conservatism nor extreme liberalism. It will be discovered in neither that bald literalism which makes of the Bible a fetish nor in that easy “literaturism” which makes of it a volume of common and rather indifferent values. Somewhere between the two must come an illumination from our present-day knowledge which will make it vitally and magnificently the Word of God to our own times, and give it voice and message transcendently more powerful and significant than is now being done for the vast majority of humanity by any school of interpretation.

## Chapter Six

### PREACH THE WORD

Unquestionably the most significant and indicative fact of the whole religious controversy over evolution is the appalling number of people, of all classes and of all grades of education, who have been bewildered and sidetracked. That a purely scientific question should come to hold such an important place in the discussions of Christian people, and that Christian leaders should waste so much time and energy either denying or affirming a scientific hypothesis, shows that something has been woefully wrong in the teaching and preaching of the Church. Our whole conception of the Bible has been fundamentally at fault if it is not expansive enough to accommodate all knowledge; and our method of interpreting it and finding its message has been far from correct if a scientific theory of processes could discommode and endanger it as the Word of God. That such an irrelevant theme should come to hold a major

place in the concern of so large a wing of the Church that it could be injected into our laws and courts wholly from religious motives, and that even for a little while it should spring to such prominence in pulpit and discussion as it has done, and do all this in a time of such social and international stress and strain, is a sad but revealing comment upon the paucity and poverty of the preaching of the Church. In the light of such a situation it seems that there could be no more central and crucial need just now than a reëmphasis and clarification of the old and oft-repeated injunction to "Preach the Word"—an injunction which, rightly understood, comes with no less biting rebuke to the conservatives than it does to the liberals. And here, too, we must be guided by certain great principles:

### *First:*

Real and effective preaching must ever be positive and aggressive. A gospel of negation and criticism has never been either winsome or forceful, but always has soon become ingrown and repellent to all but peculiar or highly indoc-trinated people. Normal folks find no help in



criticism but soon become cloyed of it. This fact ought to come with searching self-revelation to that group of extreme liberals who have in large measure stamped the stigma of negation upon liberalism. They have become obsessed with the critical habit and are noted far more for their penchant for dissecting and criticizing the Scriptures than they are for any peculiar wisdom in interpreting them. The main impression their sermons leave is that there are many things which they do not believe! Such preaching is a travesty on the word. No man is fit to be called a prophet of God who can render no greater service to humanity than to rehash the arguments which were the stock in trade of the avowed infidels fifty years ago against the miracles, the supernatural, the Virgin birth. This world is full enough of cynics and iconoclasts without having weak imitations of them in the pulpit. Such preaching can draw together only the disgruntled, the negative of spirit, the coldly critical—and such as these can never build a *church* nor form a mighty dynamic of purging and reformation. Whoever prostitutes the high calling of being prophets of God and crusaders of righteousness to the

level of querulous criticism and ill-informed controversy is not fit for leadership in a day like this. On the other hand, all this is no more true of criticism of the Bible than it is of criticism of its critics. It is amazing to what an extent many of the conservatives have yielded themselves to the spirit of negation. The one main note and impression of their preaching is that of being against something or somebody. With nauseating reiteration they denounce opinions and things with which they do not agree; and with the sole purpose of affirming the Scriptures, they give themselves over to denying what others say about the Scriptures. Theirs is truly a gospel of negation of the most virulent type, as spiritually deadening to the Church as it is useless to a world that waits for that positive, aggressive, constructive, religious leadership in great and mighty issues which alone can lead it out of the present morass up onto the high plains of safety and righteousness.

### *Second:*

No winning gospel ever has been or ever can be a defensive gospel. Perhaps the most obvi-

ous and significant fact of to-day is the extent to which preaching, when it is not simply a recital of well-worn and harmless platitudes, has lacked any magnetic and thrilling aggressiveness. Especially is this true among that group in the Church who have assumed to themselves the responsibility of being the "defenders of the faith." With pathetic but misapplied sincerity and devotion they are giving themselves over in large part to arguments for the verbal inspiration and literal rendition of the Scriptures. Thus with a generalship that is as short-sighted as it is perilous to the cause which they love, they have chosen to fight the decisive battles of faith upon the very points which are most easily assailable. It is utter foolhardiness for them to stake the security of the Book and the destiny of Christianity upon their particular viewpoint and method of interpretation or on a few Biblical passages which are wholly unrelated to the teachings of Jesus Christ. It is indeed a poor prophet of God who spends his time *defending* the Bible. Unless one can deploy his lines in unassailable territory by so unfolding and presenting the mighty truths of Scripture that they will compel the assent of

even unwilling minds and hearts, he is no preacher for this day and will gain nothing by heated arguments over points that invite discussion and dissent. The security of the Bible lies in its invincible bulwarks which no man can deny or ridicule, and it is misapplied confidence and ardor which tries to erect the defenses of faith elsewhere. Whoever permits himself to be jockeyed into a defensive position, and especially in some segment of the field far removed from the main and commanding citadels of the gospel, is no prophet of God for times like these. This is no less true for the liberals than it is for the conservatives. As we showed in our last chapter, the great and stultifying heresy with which the Church must cope to-day is disbelief in the practical applications of Christ's gospel—a disbelief that is as common in conservatism as it is in liberalism. And with a world torn by strife and hatred, cursed with national and racial antipathies and class bitterness, and weighted down with crass materialism, it is indeed tragic to find so many leaders of the hosts of righteousness drifting away from the main field of battle on a tangent of bitter controversy among themselves over literalism and verbalism

and a number of other isms that need be of interest only to the contentious and speculative. The only defense of the truth which ever has had any rightful place in the tactics of a warrior of God has been that type of aggressive warfare which has carried the conflict deep into the fields of the enemy and set the lines hard against the very heart of their antagonism. And that is the one imperious duty and obligation resting upon the Church to-day. Distracted by foolish discussions over trivial incidentals, stupefied with ritualism and creedalism, torn with bitterness and controversy, and spending its energy in a round of conventional and oft-deceptive exercises, a really triumphant and victorious defense of faith can be secured to-day only by marshaling the entire following of Jesus Christ into one daring and impetuous onslaught upon the entrenched and impudent forces of sin and unrighteousness which are damning humanity and threatening civilization.

### *Third:*

No man really preaches the Word when he gets so tangled up by argument and misled by anxiety that he places undue emphasis and in-

sistence upon the things of minor value. The one great trouble in the present controversy has been that the points of really major truth and consequence have been lost sight of. Men have contended far more anxiously for the verbal correctness of certain passages than they have for the great truths of God which inhere in those passages whether they be taken literally or not. Take the Book of Jonah for instance. The one only commonly known thing about that book is that a fish swallowed Jonah. The writer has tested this point out on scores of men's Sunday-school classes; and he has found few individuals, whether they believed that a whale really did swallow Jonah or not, who have had any useful knowledge or conception whatever of the marvelous message and meaning of the book itself. Some of them who have most insisted upon it as literal history have been farthest from practicing the missionary spirit, the interracial love and unity, and the utter abandonment of self to go anywhere and to do anything that God wants done, for which above everything else the book is placed in the Bible to teach. That there is such a widespread discussion about a historic statement concerning a



fish and such an appalling ignorance of the vital and invincible truth of duty and destiny which the book was intended to portray is a pitiful evidence of how misplaced has been the emphasis in much of the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. The same thing is true of Genesis. Christian people have not disputed about the great central truth of God's creative power and directive wisdom which the book teaches but only whether or not the incidentals of the record are historically and scientifically correct. They have not even differed in principle as much as some have thought, but only in the degree to which the book should be taken literally. For when one concedes, as Mr. Bryan did and as thousands of conservatives do, that the "day" spoken of in the story of the creation may have meant a long period of years rather than twenty-four hours, they yield the whole principle of literalism and at the same time involve themselves in inextricable difficulties with many passages concerning the Sabbath and other things. Taken either way, the Book of Genesis is spiritually impoverished and useless to the heart of man until it gives him a consciousness of God, a conviction of responsible human brotherhood, and a sense of holy duty



and destiny—and that alone makes it the *Word of God*, indispensable and imperishable. And nothing deserves to be called *preaching* which fritters away its time contending over the literal exactness or inexactness of the letter but fails to make plain that great and throbbing spirit which compels instinctive response in the soul of every individual.

#### *Fourth:*

The Bible ranges over a wide latitude and touches a thousand things of truth and right. But it can never be the Word of God to any man save only as it stirs this response and this God-consciousness in his own soul. It is the high mission and holy purpose of preaching to help it accomplish this thing. But whoever would be such a herald of the gospel must forge and direct his message for the mind of his hearer rather than for his own. And herein arises much of the present difficulty. Inside of the pulpit and outside of it we have all been perhaps more insistent that men shall agree with our own viewpoint and interpretation than that they shall find in the Bible the most helpful and timely word of God to them. We have not recognized each other's limitations and necessities.

Lying far down underneath all of the discussion and dissension upon Biblical and theological matters, upon modes and systems and dogmas, which have troubled the Church all of these ages, is the constricted and impoverished conception which we have had of the Heavenly Father and of his hopes and dreams and purposes for humanity through Jesus Christ our Lord. So much of our preaching and teaching about him and his will has been characterized by littleness. Our picture of God and his righteousness has been dwarfed by human limitations and our interpretation of the Word of God has been characterized by the same human imperfections. And what the world most needs now is not a reversion to ancient viewpoints and worn-out shibboleths but rather an advance into more magnificent and challenging proportions of the gospel than those into which the Church has ever dared to venture before. In the common mind of the world, and all too often among even the followers of Jesus Christ, Christianity has resolved itself largely into a set of trivial moralities. But we live in a day of great enterprises and vast resources, and nothing short of a mag-

nificent interpretation of God and duty and destiny can give Christianity a content sufficient to thrill and challenge the heart of present-day humanity. The gospel which we preach must be positive. It must ring with the ideals of the Kingdom. It must be athrill with the spirit of the crusader for righteousness—and righteousness in the great and controlling motives and issues of life as well as in the minor moralities. It must defy men to find anything better for which to live—to find anything holier and more worthy for which to die. And indeed unless it offers for our own day something infinitely worth while for which a man may die, for which every follower of Jesus Christ might well die, our preaching will be impotent to outbid the wealth and the ease and the luxury which would lure humanity to its destruction. The Bible is instinct with just such a marvelous vision of worth and service, and prolific with source-material for such a message. Through it all runs the intimation and the revelation of the Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, magnificent and mighty to thrill and captivate even times like these. How

pathetic, then, that the Church should so misunderstand the magnitude and magnificence of its own gospel as to be anxious and divided over matters of small moment and wasting its opportunity and dissipating its spirit in heated argument over questions of little consequence and thus in the mind of the world identify Christianity with things of trivial circumstance and easy jest. With the heart of Jesus Christ anguished over the sin of mankind, and while the world is so weary of war and bitterness and so torn by strife and hatred, such an abridgment of his gospel to the narrow compass of old shibboleths and to the shallow shoals of controversial ritualism and literalism is a misunderstanding of God and his Word that is unpardonable indeed. Everywhere throughout the earth the desperate and crying need of humanity calls for a larger and more magnificent application of the gospel and vision of the Kingdom. And no man is truly preaching the Word of God for our day and generation who does not in some measure make his message and his appeal measure up to the sublimity of the gospel of Jesus Christ for a challenge and an opportunity like this.

## Chapter Seven

### THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH

Words! Words! Words! Thousands and thousands of them, and many of them with various shades of meaning. Moreover oftentimes words have different meanings to different people, or come to change their meaning and significance as the years go by. And words are made up into sentences composed of various kinds of phrases, the exact meaning of which is dependent in no small measure upon what particular punctuation marks are used, and where. Indeed to such an extent is this so that it is difficult to write a long paragraph which cannot be interpreted in two or three different ways. Every lawyer knows how true this is. Yet we are accustomed to think of language as being intelligible and illuminating—and it is. But it is also exceedingly complex and often indefinite and confusing. Now this must have been one of the reasons why the Word became flesh and dwelt among men. It was the only way in which God could make him-

self absolutely plain and understandable to men and women and his spirit unmistakable. Think for a moment how the written word, with the many limitations of language, had failed adequately to portray and express the Heavenly Father.

*First:*

Long ere Christ came, the Jews had treasured a written revelation of God; but they certainly were not reading into it the interpretation of him and of his desires for all mankind which he wanted them to gather from it. Instead of discovering in its wonderful passages the fatherhood of God for all humanity, they were misusing it to exalt their own haughty and exclusive racial spirit and ambition. Instead of finding in it a clear and distinct message, they were in continual disagreement among themselves about its teachings and its commandments; and their chief religious zeal more often occupied itself in bitter argumentation over the letter than it did in seeking to do the will of the Father as expressed in the spirit of the law. This is always the temptation and the tendency in the use of

written language, and many there be who unconsciously yield themselves to this danger. All of us have heard preachers and Sunday-school teachers roundly denounce the Scribes and the Pharisees for the literalism of which they themselves were also guilty. Just as did the Scribes of old, these latter-day "letterists" have doted on carefully gathered proof-texts and fragmentary passages, the very spirit and meaning of which, as accumulated and quoted by them, are contrary to all of the larger spirit and message of the Book and belie the very nature of God and the character of Jesus Christ. These are some of the limitations of language, whether spoken or written—limitations which we most keenly feel when we are trying exactly and sufficiently to express our own poor human thoughts. How much more keenly, then, must our Heavenly Father have felt the shortcomings of human language and the pitfalls and difficulties of the written word, however divinely inspired it might be, to express in adequate and unmistakable manner the marvelous riches of his mind and the wondrous beauties of his great heart. He found it utterly impossible to breathe into the written Word his



spirit sufficiently to prevent its misinterpretation and its misunderstanding, especially to those unskilled in the use of language—or to those adept in the misuse of language, twisting and distorting it to bolster up in convincing manner pet dogmas or opinions which they wished to advance. Misunderstood, misinterpreted, misrepresented, in spite of his written Word, it is no wonder that God sent his only begotten Son, and that the Word became flesh that all humanity might come to know something of the real mind and heart and spirit of the Father; for these attributes cannot be put adequately into written words but must be lived in actual, throbbing, understandable life.

### *Second:*

Another limitation of written language is its inadaptability to the new situations and new issues which arise after it is written. Once that words are put down in written form, they become immobile. What is written is indeed written—and cannot be recast and rewritten to meet new occasions. To comprehend this fact is to make obvious to every intelligent mind the fearful limitations which the written Word placed upon the Father heart and the Father

spirit. It would seem to make God static. It would seem to bind him down to many of the particular customs and ideas and provincialisms of the certain age or generation in which it was written. It would seem to narrow his thought and his comprehension to some peculiar time or race or conventionality, as though God could not adapt himself and his understanding to various peoples and times and to the marvelous transformations which would inevitably take place throughout the centuries. It was this limitation of written language which so confused the Scribes and the Pharisees and perverted their opinions. They could not seem to get it into their heads that God's revelation was a steadily unfolding and developing one, and that the standard of ethics and the religious practices which God would countenance or even endorse for certain ages and conditions would become intolerable and reprehensible under other and more enlightened situations. Jesus scathingly rebuked them for their failure at this point, and tried to make them understand that while a "tooth for a tooth" and an "eye for an eye" might have done passingly well for the primitive and cruel conditions of life in the

times of the Judges, that that old law certainly was unthinkable and obsolete for the development of civilization in which they were then living. To the average reader words mean simply explicit statements and precepts. It is a rare interpreter to whom they breathe a *spirit* infinitely larger and deeper and more plastic than their literal translation. In contrast to this, the outstanding fact about every person is the spirit of his life—the spirit which we learn to know and to love and to adapt to a thousand different circumstances and issues though the individual himself whose spirit we are following is not there. Every man, for instance, so well knows his own mother that he knows just about what she would say or do under any striking circumstance and what would be her attitude on any particular problem. Thus, long years after she is gone, her spirit guides and molds him in a thousand issues and circumstances in which she herself never lived and about which she never in any way expressed her opinion. This is the infinite and inextinguishable power of even the human spirit to project itself into the coming years and adapt itself and its teachings and its impress to all of their new environments

and situations. Because of this principle of personality and its immeasurable superiority over the written word, the Word became flesh in order that mankind might come to know the great invisible and eternal spirit of the Heavenly Father, with its inexhaustible capacity to understand and fit into every age and generation and meet the peculiar and distinct problems and conditions of each new day.

### *Third:*

Clinging simply to the literal word, Christian people again and again have been led into confusion and humiliation on matters of right and duty and ethics, and have used the Bible to support concubinage and polygamy and slavery and the liquor traffic and many other wrong things because they were practiced in that far-away day. But holding fast to the spirit of Jesus Christ, and its ample faculty to understand every age and every generation and adapt itself thereto with searching casuistry and elevated moral sensitiveness and passion, wise followers of the Master have never been tripped up on these things. Regardless of what even the saints did in Bible times, they have found

in the spirit of Jesus Christ as manifested in his life and his teaching another and far more exalted standard and monitor for their conduct, one which has goaded every succeeding generation on to new and finer interpretations and applications of his will to their contemporaneous problems and issues of life. Using the Bible thus, the followers of Jesus Christ need never be tricked nor troubled for a moment by what godly people did in Bible times. They are never disconcerted or misled, for instance, because of the fact that Paul admonished Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach's sake nor because Jesus made wine for a wedding feast and was accused of being a winebibber. All that was away back in another day and under other social and civic conditions. But every rational and intelligent interpretation of the spirit of both Paul and Jesus Christ, as manifested in their whole life and work, impels every thinking man to the conviction that if they were here now in our modern situation, with our fight on against the cursed traffic in human misery and woe carried on by the liquor business, they would be against alcoholic drink in every phase and form and with their whole heart and soul.

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And the same thing is true of war. No unindoctrinated mind, studying Jesus Christ apart from any preconceived ideas, and catching the wondrous tenderness and compassion of his spirit and the marvelous sanity and good sense of his judgments, could for a moment conceive of him as being in favor of anything so heartlessly brutal and so brazenly stupid as war. It is impossible to think of him, if he were here now, as being caught in any other position than as an aggressive opponent against the war method of settling differences. War is immeasurably worse than it was in his day, and its relation to the moral and intellectual judgment of mankind is not the same—and he could now be nothing less than an invincible leader against it. The same is true with reference to every other moral and spiritual issue which has been forced to the front in a new way since Jesus lived. Whoever clings simply to the exact deed, and mode, and word of Jesus Christ, and fails to get from his whole life as it is embodied in the Gospels a clear conviction of his spirit, and whoever clings to that literal Word and fails to transmute into the life of our own day its inextinguishable and adaptable spirit, is



bound to be driven into endless confusion and inconsistency in the use of the Bible and is likely to take the wrong side of many moral issues, just as many earnest Christians in the world to-day have been and are being misled into supporting the liquor traffic because Jesus made wine. The Word became flesh—became flesh that we might know it as a living being, a dynamic and forcefully impressive personality, who breathes an undying spirit that can be confined to no age or circumstance but that has endless adaptability as a living, sensible, sensitive, comprehending spirit to conform itself intelligently and understandingly to every new situation.

#### *Fourth:*

Another most important reason why God must have wanted the Word to become flesh arises from the mental limitations of men and women, vast numbers of whom in every generation have not, because of the lack of training or capacity, the ability to use the written word. His written revelation had long been in existence, but still mankind had but a dim and woefully imperfect knowledge of him. Always



there have been millions and millions of men and women too ignorant to read and understand any book. To them, any written revelation was a closed revelation save as it was read and explained and interpreted by other individuals. This opened the way for all sorts of serious and misleading complications. It gave to multitudes only a second-hand revelation—a revelation that had to be passed on to them through intermediaries who, however honestly they tried, could do the work only imperfectly and who were sure to be partly if not wholly misunderstood by their hearers. And to this was added the grave certainty that there would always be some among the interpreters who would purposely warp and pervert the teachings of that revelation to their own selfish ends or who would become so obsessed with some dogma or system that they would interpret the Book only from that viewpoint and thus innocently distort its actual spirit and emphasis as much as if they had done so deliberately. For these reasons the handed-down interpretation has always been a very imperfect and incomplete transcription of the Book at best, and at its worst a very misleading and

harmful thing. The vast multitudes who could not read, or who could read only imperfectly, and who had little training and capacity in the understanding of written language, always have been sadly at the mercy of their scribes and interpreters. But though such people do not know how to use books, they can know and understand and love persons—especially that supreme Person, who is supremely winsome and lovable. No rational being is ever too ignorant or too limited in capacity for that. And so the Word became flesh that all mankind might have first-hand and intimate access to him and learn to adore and interpret him in their own hearts and lives. It is this warm and lovable *personality* of Jesus Christ which alone makes his gospel fascinating and forceful to great numbers of men and women who simply have not the mental capacity to comprehend the profound philosophy of his religion. His simpler teachings they can understand; but it is intellectually impossible for them to grasp the profound content and significance of the creeds over which the churches have quarreled all these ages and are still quarreling. Never in any age has more than a tithe of the Christian

believers had minds penetrative enough to understand the theology and philosophy underlying Christianity. They learned their creeds by rote and quoted them parrot-like with precious little real insight into the meaning of it all. But what they did feel and understand was the personal attachment between themselves and their Lord. And upon this personal attachment and loyalty, not upon their intellectual faith and understanding, was built up the life and the work of the Church. Their controlling and impelling faith that molded them found its genesis and its power in Christ as a personal savior and friend rather than in the finely spun and elaborate statements and confessions of the various churches. Few indeed yet know what these creeds are all about or the tremendously intricate and difficult questions which are inherent in them. But they can know and do know Jesus Christ. They can love and follow him. They can receive him into their own hearts and lives and learn to breathe his spirit into all that they do and are. And this, and this alone, has been the heart and power of the evangelical and evangelistic gospel the world over. In the light of this fact, the embittered controversies and

divisions which have arisen in the Church over written creeds and philosophies which few or none could more than dimly comprehend and understand has been the one most appalling tragedy of all Christian history. And it is being repeated again in this battle about evolution, of which few indeed are qualified to speak. What might not have been done in the ages past, what might not still be done for humanity, if instead of fighting over theories and interpretations of written documents the Church had given and would now give its undivided mind and heart to a more perfect and a more irresistible presentation of the altogether lovable and adorable personality of Jesus Christ! It was for this very purpose that the Word became flesh, that men might come so to know and to love him that all other things would become secondary and that they might become one in him to make him known to all the world—a world that can little comprehend or care for theories and theologies, but that can passionately love and follow the Incarnate Christ.

### *Fifth:*

But for still another reason was it imperative that some revelation far superior to the

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written word should be given. Not only has language, either written or spoken, those shortcomings mentioned above; but the human mind and heart even of the most learned, have natural and inherent limitations under which they never respond in their fullest and holiest capacity to language, however inspired and winsome. Words and precepts mean so little to the average man or woman. Principles and dogmas are such cold and unimpassioned things to the common human mind. The vast multitudes of mankind could never have been brought to yield their lives with utter abandonment simply to precepts and principles, however glorious. There must be something infinitely more alive than just words to make these precepts and principles live and to accomplish in the heart of humanity what God dreamed and longed for for his children. So Jesus Christ was sent into the world to incarnate the Word of God and articulate it to the human soul. Only the literate can read words; and only the scholar can understand their fullest content. But every human being, let us repeat, can love a person. The most illiterate, the most mentally limited, those of humblest and most unprivileged origin, can know and love with profound devotion the

heart and the soul of another. And so the Word became flesh—became flesh and dwelt among men in order that all mankind might come to know God, know him as a person, with a mind and a heart and a personality which could be understood and loved by the most ignorant as well as the most scholarly, by the most humble as well as the most exalted. A Person—to whom multitudes of men and women would gladly give their lives in happy service, yea, in utter abandonment and sacrifice, as few ever could have been persuaded to do for principles and precepts. A Person—warm, compassionate, full of mercy and lovingkindness, infinitely winsome and compelling in power of personality. A Person—just such as every human heart has need of and at its best can understand enough to want and to love. And so the Word was made flesh!

There were other reasons, mightier and deeper perhaps, why God sent his only begotten Son into the world. But these of which we have spoken are reasons which are marvelously illuminating and significant just now, and which ought deeply to be pondered by every Bible student. Whoever misses the principles



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which we have presented here limits and confuses his own mind and is quite likely to do violence to the very spirit and purpose of the Word of God which he loves.

To the Church these principles, as we have intimated, are of tremendous and revolutionary import. They mean, above everything else, that the Church must give a better reincarnation of Christ than it has done. Men and women the world over are indifferent to his gospel or disregardful of his gospel only because his own followers have so poorly incarnated him and his spirit and purpose in their own lives. The vast multitudes have not been able to understand his written word or his preached word, or have not been persuaded by his written or his preached word; but they would have been charmed and won by his lived word if only the living of it had been more perfect and compelling in the lives of his followers. They cannot comprehend dissertations and dogma, and care little for them; but they can comprehend flesh and blood and are passionately concerned about the men and women with whom they come in daily contact and whose lives are in-



extricably bound up with their own. All too often they have seen little or nothing in the Christians about them that appears significantly different, not in the little moralities but in the big and consequential issues of life, from the lives of many of those who are not Christian. The world sees nothing in creeds and ceremonies that seems worth while to it—but it could not long remain insensible of or indifferent to the infinite worth of the Kingdom if only the spirit and life of that Kingdom were being more abundantly manifested in the lives of his followers. This is the supreme task of the Church, not to defend its faith but to live its faith. Its immediate and awful responsibility is not to protect and safeguard theories about Christ, but to incarnate Christ and make him live anew for every age and generation in the lives of his followers. Not the poor, dwarfed, emaciated Christ that oftentimes he has been made to appear even in his majesty and glory; but rather the tender, compassionate, all-sufficient lover and friend whom all humanity need and will want to love and serve when once they can be made to understand and know him. This is the task and the unspeakably

precious privilege of the Church—and it is a task and privilege that is far, far removed from the contentions and strife over the written word which most have dissipated its strength and marred its spirit. The Word was made flesh that all such limitation and mistake might be avoided. God's method must become our method—and only as we his followers transmute that Word day by day into our own living hearts and lives will men and women be won to him and the kingdoms of this earth become his precious and triumphant Kingdom.

THE END







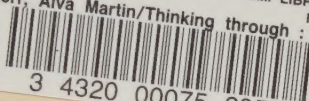


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